

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 03117 081913Z
ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: IS, PINT
SUBJECT: THE IMPACT OF THE WEIZMAN RESIGNATION THREAT

SUMMARY: DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN'S THREAT TO RESIGN HAS
DRAMATICALLY FOCUSED ATTENTION ON A RIFT IN THE BEGIN
GOVERNMENT OVER SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY. WEIZMAN IS BLAMED
FOR POOR TIMING AND IS SEEN BY SOME AS HAVING OVERPLAYED
HIS HAND IN A NAKED POWER PLAY. BEGIN IS CHASTISED FOR
ALLOWING GOVERNMENT DISUNITY TO HAVE REACHED CRISIS
PROPORTIONS. A CONFRONTATION IS EXPECTED ON THE RETURN OF
THE ISRAELI TEAM FROM WASHINGTON. BEGIN WILL UNDOUBTEDLY
ATTEMPT TO RESTORE UNITY WITHOUT HAVING TO SACRIFICE
ANY OF HIS SENIOR MINISTERS. END SUMMARY

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 03117 081913Z

1. DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN'S THREAT TO RESIGN HAS
BROUGHT TO A HEAD THE DIVISION IN THE COALITION OVER
SETTLEMENT POLICY. REACTIONS IN ISRAEL HAVE BEEN
INTENSE AND CRITICISM HAS FOCUSED BOTH ON WEIZMAN AND
ON BEGIN. ON THE ONE HAND WEIZMAN IS SEEN AS UNNECESSARILY
WEAKENING THE ISRAELI POSITION ON THE EVE OF THE
WASHINGTON TALKS BY BRINGING INTO THE OPEN A MAJOR

SPLIT WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD SO FAR SUCCESSFULLY GLOSSED OVER WITH INCONSISTENT ACTIONS AND REHTORIC. THE SOURCE OF MOST OF THIS CRITICISM IS THE HARDLINE HERUT AND LA'AM WINGS OF THE LIKUD. IN ADDITION TO CRITICISING WEIZMAN FOR THE TIMING OF HIS THREAT, THE DENIGRATE IT AS A MERE POWER PLAY REFLECTING MORE WEIZMAN'S AMBITION THAN HIS DEDICATION TO A PARTICULAR PEACE STRATEGY.

2. MOST OF THE BLAME FOR THE INCIDENT, HOWEVER, IS PLACED ON BEGIN WHO HAS BEEN UNABLE IN THE LAST MONTHS TO RESOLVE IN HIS OWN MIND THE QUESTION OF SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY DURING NEGOTIATIONS AND INSTEAD HAS ATTEMPTED TO APPEASE AT ONE TIME VARIOUS CONFLICTING VIEWS OF HIS SENIOR MINISTERS. IF NOTHING ELSE IT IS CLEAR THAT BEGIN WILL HAVE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THIS ISSUE ON THE RETURN OF THE ISRAELI TEAM FROM WASHINGTON. MOST SPECULATION NOW CONCERNS THE POSSIBLE CONFRONTATION THAT WILL OCCUR AT THAT TIME BETWEEN THOSE SUPPORTING WEIZMAN'S MODERATE POSITION AND THE HARDLINERS FOR WHOM AGRICULTURE MINISTER SHARON SERVES AS SPOKESMAN. BEGIN, ALTHOUGH IN THE PAST MORE CONCILIATORY TOWARDS WEIZMAN THAN SHARON, MAY NOW HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENTLY PROVOKED BY WEIZMAN'S "DISLOYALTY" AND THREATENED BY HIS PERCEIVED AMBITION THAT HE WOULD ATTEMPT, ONCE AND FOR ALL, TO ELIMINATE A COMPETING POWER CENTER WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 03117 081913Z

3. THE RESOLUTION OF THE BEGIN-WEIZMAN SPLIT WILL BE CONTINGENT IN LARGE PART ON THE PERCEIVED SUCCESS OR LACK OF SUCCESS OF THE UPCOMING WASHINGTON TALKS. WHETHER WEIZMAN HAS WEAKENED HIS POSITION BY HIS ACTIONS AND HIS OVERLY FRANK COMMENTS TO THE ISRAELI PRESS DURING THE LAST 36 HOURS IS NOT CLEAR AT THIS STAGE. HIS RESIGNATION THREAT HAS NOT BEEN WELL RECEIVED BY THE HERUT STALWARTS; IT ALSO IS SEEN BY OTHER OBSERVERS AS A REFLECTION OF A REDUCED POSITION OF STRENGTH BY VIRTUE OF HIS FEELING FORCED TO RESORT TO SUCH DRASTIC MEASURES. THIS SAID, IN OUR JUDGMENT WEIZMAN IS FAR FROM BEING COUNTED OUT IN THE EVENT OF ANY CONFRONTATION. IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT HE IS THE ONE MINISTER OTHER THAN BEGIN WHO HAS SUPPORT BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT. IF HIS THREAT ALIENATED MOST OF HERUT (WHICH IN ANY CASE WOULD HAVE SUPPORTED BEGIN IN A SHOWDOWN) HE HAS GAINED WITH THOSE WITHIN THE LIKUD COALITION AND OTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT, WHO HAVE FOR SOME TIME BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT GROWING INFLUENCE OF HARDLINERS ON FOREIGN POLICY.

4. BEGIN HIMSELF HAS NOW STATED THAT THE "MESS WILL

BE CLEARED UP" ON HIS RETURN FROM WASHINGTON. SPECULATION
ABOUNDS AS TO HOW THIS TRANSLATES INTO PERSONNEL CHANGES
WITHIN THE CABINET. WHILE INTERESTING AND IMAGINATIVE
SCENARIOS ARE OFFERED FROM ALL SIDES, AT THIS POINT
IT IS PROBABLY MOST LIKELY THAT BEGIN WILL ATTEMPT
TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION IN WHICH WEIZMAN WOULD
BE FORCED TO LEAVE. WHETHER A NEW UNITY CAN BE
IMPOSED ON THE COALITION WHICH WOULD ALLOW FOR EFFECTIVE
AND CONSISTENT POLICY ON SETTLEMENT AND OTHER ISSUES
WITHOUT SACRIFICING EITHER SHARON OR WEIZMAN, REMAINS DOUBTFUL.
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